

*To J. Paxton Esq  
with the author's kind reg*  
ON

THE IMPORTANCE OF

STUDYING AND PRESERVING

THE LANGUAGES

SPOKEN BY

UNCIVILIZED NATIONS,

WITH

THE VIEW OF ELUCIDATING THE PHYSICAL  
HISTORY OF MAN.

BY DR. HODGKIN.

---

[From the LONDON and EDINBURGH PHILOSOPHICAL MAGAZINE and JOURNAL  
of SCIENCE for July 1835.]

---

LONDON:

PRINTED BY RICHARD TAYLOR,

RED LION COURT, FLEET STREET.

---

1835.

Suppl. / P

HOEDER KIN, T.

348319



*On the Importance of Studying and Preserving the Languages spoken by Uncivilized Nations, with the view of elucidating the Physical History of Man. Read to the Philological Society. By Dr. HODGKIN.—1835.*

THE following paper was read before the Philological Society by Dr. Hodgkin, in the course of the present session, and is printed with the permission of that Society, in order to make known some of the suggestions contained in it.

**B**EFORE proceeding to the objects which it is my design to lay before you, I would beg leave to take a rapid glance at the range which our Association may be considered to embrace. The study of language may, I conceive, be taken up on several distinct grounds: 1st. It may be considered metaphysically, by which I mean the consideration of language generally, as the means of giving expression to the feelings and operations of the mind. To this head might belong the question whether language is coeval with the creation of man, or has been gradually worked out by the development of his faculties, having nothing more than the mere capability of utterance as the original material with which to work. I confess that whilst it is impossible to doubt the progressive development of language, I am inclined to unite with those who admit the former proposition. The metaphysical philologist may nevertheless pursue his speculations and inquire hypothetically into the mode in which language might be progressively built up to satisfy the wants of man. With this inquiry, however, I have little inclination to meddle, but I would take this occasion to mention an interesting essay in some degree bearing on this subject, recently written by Benjamin Harrison, jun., of Christ Church, Oxford. To this same division of the subject belong the general or universal principles of grammar. 2ndly. Another division of the subject, to which there is some difficulty in giving a name, forms a most essential part of what are called the Belles Lettres. It has not so much to do with the wide range offered by the numerous languages spoken in different parts of the globe as with the profound and critical knowledge of a few to which common consent has given a prominent position. These are studied in all the varieties of style and idiom as well as in the modifications which at different periods they have exhibited. This branch of the subject necessarily requires an intimate and



minute acquaintance with the best authors who have written in these languages; and the individual who has successfully devoted himself to this branch of our subject, is considered *par excellence* a learned man and a great scholar. It is not my object to detract from the estimation which pure and elegant Latinity and an intimate acquaintance with the dialects, idioms, and metres of the Greeks have by common consent conferred; but it is not in my power to engage your attention in this department. There is another, the 3rd, which I shall mention, which seems more associated with the studies of my own profession; this may be styled the physiological department of philology. To this department belong the interesting researches respecting the production of the vowel sounds, the modification of the voice by the movements of the larynx and the cooperation of the tongue, teeth, lips, and nose. It is not, however, in this department that I propose seeking this evening's occupation, yet I would remark in passing that there are certain modifications of language which it seems necessary to refer to this department, and which cannot fail to introduce a difficult complication, and even serious errors, if they are allowed to be blended with the points of inquiry which legitimately belong to the next division which I shall have to notice. I allude to certain modifications and transitions of sounds which probably pervade all languages, as the result of physiological or organic causes, rather than as proceeding from their mutual relationship as branches of a particular stock. Although it is not my intention to enter minutely into this question, I shall offer a few examples by way of illustration: the substitution of one letter for another is a modification of the kind to which I am alluding. Thus the B is changed into a V in converting the Latin *Diabolus* into the Italian *Diavolo*. A similar change seems to have taken place with the modern Greeks, who say *vivlos* for *biblos* (βιβλος), and *vasilefs* for *basisileus* (βασιλευς). It may, however, be questioned whether this is not the true ancient pronunciation preserved by the descendants of the Greeks, from which other nations have seceded, yet I am aware that there are strong reasons for doubting that this is the case. That this change is not a characteristic of a particular stock in language, but rather one of those changes which may be common to them all, and be referrible to some physical cause, maybe inferred from the fact that a similar substitution is to be found on the north coast of Africa amongst persons who speak Arabic\*. I observed this in a

\* I have noticed several instances of the similar substitution of one letter for another in the vocabularies of different dialects of the Polynesian language.



gentleman from Morocco, and I found that his substitution of B for V,—which I think he made reciprocally, so that he would have said ‘Biridi certat vacca benafro,’—was connected with a deficiency in the perception of the sounds of these two letters. He could distinguish no difference between Bacca and Vacca. The substitution of V for W and W for V, which is so characteristic of the vulgar London pronunciation, seems to be of precisely the same character. An individual who exhibited this peculiarity asserted that his ear could detect no difference between Weal and Veal, Winegar and Vinegar. Whether this insensibility be general amongst those who have acquired this vulgar London peculiarity I am not prepared to say, but I have known a similar insensibility to exist where another substitution of the same kind had taken place. In some parts of Worcestershire and Herefordshire a striking error prevails in the use of the aspirate; we hear it employed where it should be suppressed, and it is suppressed where it should be employed. Although this is done so systematically that it seems like the result of design and principle, yet, as I have just stated, I know that it may take place from a want of perception of the difference existing between the two sounds. I heard a gentleman from that district say that he could not distinguish *as* from *has*. I am unable to say how far changes of this kind are to be attributed to a defective appreciation of the sounds produced, but I believe there can be little doubt that such changes are rather to be attributed to a want of aptitude in the organ producing than in the organ perceiving the sound. A cause of this latter kind operates to prevent many persons from pronouncing the TH, to which, in consequence, they give the power of T or D. A similar difficulty occasions the L to be pronounced like R, as, for example, “the *Rong* grories of majestic Rome,” for the *Long* glories, &c. Children, in learning to speak, often, transiently, exhibit difficulties of this kind, which they for the most part speedily surmount, unless the difficulty be very great, in which case it may become permanent.

The commutation of one letter for another, as is exhibited in the declinable parts of speech, in the composition of compound words, and also in the concurrence of words in a sentence, of which there are so many striking examples in the Greek language, are doubtless to be referred to some physical cause which may sometimes be found in the greater facility of utterance, and at others in the more agreeable sound conveyed to the ear. The manner of contraction from double vowels to diphthongs, and from long vowels to short, is to be referred to a similar cause, as being rather dependent on a



physical cause than to be regarded as a peculiarity connected with a particular language. The contraction of *OI* into *I* in Greek seems to be quite analogous to the vulgar pronunciation of *pint* and *pison* for *point* and *poison*. It is by no means improbable that some of these peculiarities of pronunciation and the predominance or suppression of certain sounds in particular districts, although proceeding from physical causes, and therefore to be regarded as distinct from those characters which indicate connexion with a particular stock, may nevertheless be characteristic of a particular race, the organic peculiarity prevailing, like those of colour, form of the head, expression of countenance, stature, and the like, from hereditary transmission. That peculiar dialect of English spoken by negroes when living as an enslaved or otherwise oppressed race amongst the English or their descendants, though partly to be ascribed to the neglect of their education and to the encouragement which whites give to this dialect, by themselves falling into it when conversing with negroes, is doubtless principally to be ascribed to the same physical causes which give a characteristic softness to several of the languages on the west coast of Africa, and thus, like the colour of their skin and the form of their features, indicates the stock from whence they are derived, independently of any infusion of words from their own languages with which they may have corrupted the English. The investigation and classification of these changes, influenced by physical causes, might greatly facilitate the labour of those who may apply themselves to the acquisition of several languages, as well as aid those investigations which more particularly fall under the class of which I am next to speak.

The fourth and last division of the subject may perhaps be called the Natural History of Language, its object being to investigate and classify the numerous languages which are spoken upon the face of the globe; to refer them, as far as they admit of being so traced, to different primitive stocks or languages, from which there is reason to apprehend that many of them have proceeded as from a parent or common stock; and to discover, as far as inherent and collateral evidence can render possible, the modifications which the intermixture of language derived from a different stock may have produced, and the time and mode by which these changes by infusion have been brought about. These inquiries are perhaps the most important which can be undertaken for the elucidation of the physical history of man; this division of the subject may therefore be regarded as one of the most interesting and important in which man can be engaged. Although the arduous and suc-



cessful labours of many distinguished philologists, amongst whom must be especially mentioned Herder, Adelung, Vater, W. and A. Humboldt, Rask, Klaproth, Prichard, Marsden, Grotefend, Crawford, &c., have done much to excite an interest in this subject, not only in its elucidation, but by extending the inquiry into new regions, yet it is still very far from having obtained the estimation and encouragement which it merits. If I am not greatly mistaken, the thorough investigation of language, on this extensive scale, is absolutely essential to the philologist and to the antiquary or historian, to render theirs integral sciences. Without it their deepest researches and most successfully rewarded exertions only go to the production of a fragment, which, though mighty and splendid, is but a fragment, failing to convey a just idea of the whole. In this view of the subject, Philology and History may be considered somewhat in the same state as the science of Botany would be were it based solely upon the Flora of a particular district; and some of its cultivators may be compared to the ingenious and successful florist who brings out the varieties and beauties which a few species are capable of producing, rather than to the Linnæuses, the Jussieus, the Decandolles, and the Browns. It may perhaps be more correct to compare the state of that branch of Philology which we are now considering to Geology at the time of Buffon, when many and valuable detached facts had been found out and recorded, when the importance of the conclusions to which they might lead were acknowledged, but when these conclusions could not be drawn, and when that great man and some others trusted to supply the deficiency by systems wrought out by their own vigorous imaginations.

If there be any value to be attached to Philology on the comprehensive scale to which I have alluded, we must have a great accession of numerical strength in the class of patient and able observers who may be content to amass facts, both in language and on collateral subjects, without any ruling bias as to the result to which these observations may seem for a time to tend. This is the course which has been successfully pursued with respect to Geology, and which has made it perhaps the most popular subject of investigation of the present day. There is, however, an important difference between the pursuit of Geology and that of Philology to the extent which I am pointing out. If the philological investigations are the more difficult and laborious, and are further removed from the reach of those who may feel an interest in the pursuit, and if it be on this account a less inviting science, there are reasons which do not exist in the case of Geology, or perhaps in any



other science, to urge to the prompt and zealous pursuit of it. The geological facts which escape observation or record in this year, or even in this century, may be investigated with equal or greater success in centuries to come. The same may be said of almost every other science except that of Philology in its most comprehensive sense. The precious materials with which alone this fabric can be constructed are like the fleeting moments of time itself, which are removing them irrevocably from our research. It becomes therefore a matter of very serious consideration for those who feel the importance of Philology, or rather of that branch of it with which we are now occupied, to bring into its service without delay all the available strength which can be mustered.

I must confess that my object in bringing this paper before my fellow members of the Philological Society has been to submit to their judgement certain measures which I have been led to believe might, with their sanction and support, be made very successfully to conduce to the investigation of this branch of Philology as well as to other researches intimately connected with it.

Before I proceed to offer these suggestions it may not be amiss to take a superficial survey of the present state of the subject, in order that we may have before us, not only the vast extent of the present deficiency, but also some of the grounds of encouragement which prompt to perseverance notwithstanding the apparent discouragement which exists.

I shall adopt as the basis of this sketch the tabular view which is given by my excellent friend Dr. Prichard, which, although it requires alteration in some points, is, I apprehend, the most correct general survey that we at present possess.

From this table it appears that the Indo-European, the Western Asiatic, the Northern Asiatic and Eastern European, and the Chinese and Indo-Chinese, including those known to have existed as distinct, with those which at present do so, comprise nearly two hundred nations, to which we may ascribe forty-one languages, besides many which are unknown or not mentioned.

According to the same authority we are at present more or less acquainted with upwards of forty different African races, several of which are numerous subdivided. There are above twenty ascertained languages, and of some of these there appear to be various dialects; and it is admitted that there are besides thirty-eight languages wholly unknown to us. Amongst the comparatively recent attempts to increase our knowledge of the African languages, I may mention that my friend Jomard, a member of the French Institute and one of the *Commission*



*d'Egypte*, has paid considerable attention to the Jalloff language and has composed a grammar, and I believe a dictionary of the same. Hannah Kilham, a minister in my own society, whose zeal led her to make three voyages to Africa, reduced as many as five or six African languages, besides the Jalloff, to a written form. A laborious article has been written on the Birbir language. The missionaries in Southern Africa have paid some attention to the languages spoken in that quarter, and the languages of the Copts and Abyssinians have not been neglected.

The widely scattered inhabitants of the islands of the Indian Archipelago and Pacific Ocean compose twenty-four groups, which seem to be referrible to two or three principal divisions. In many instances the languages spoken by these groups are confessedly allied. They are by most admitted to have more or less affinity to the Malay, properly so called. In some instances the languages are unknown, and in others they are said, but upon what authority I know not, to be quite peculiar. The similarity between the languages spoken in several of these groups was noticed by Captain Cook, and has been confirmed by many voyagers since his time. The subject of these languages has been scientifically taken up by Marsden and Crawford, by some German philologists, and by missionaries employed by this country. Articles on this subject have lately appeared in the *Quarterly Review*, and I have recently been informed that Baron W. Humboldt is at present engaged in a work on these languages\*. I must not attempt to enter into any of the views of these authors, but I cannot omit to notice the work and views of another author which appear to me to deserve considerable attention. I allude to the Essay of Dr. Lang on the origin and migration of the Polynesian nation. One of the objects of the Doctor's work is to show that the several dialects spoken in the islands of the Pacific Ocean are branches of the Malay stock; and again, that the Malay language, with its ramifications, is of Asiatic origin, and if not derived from the Chinese, is at least related to it. He meets the objection which might be raised from the fact that the Polynesian and other branches of the Malay stock are not so monosyllabic as the Chinese language, by observing that the former are often lengthened by prefixed or suffixed particles, which seem to be added in order to increase the number of vowel sounds. Thus, the word *tong*, which signifies *east* in the Chinese, is converted into *tonga* in the lan-

\* Since this paper was read to the Philological Society, this excellent man and profound philologist has paid the debt of nature. Of the state in which he has left the paper here referred to we can give no information.



guage of New Zealand. He further notices the prevalence of particular sounds, as that of the *ng*, which occurs either at the beginning or the end of words in both languages, and of the particles *e* or *y*, *pa*, *pe*, *te*, *ka*, and *ko*, or *to*, which are of frequent use in them, and, as it would appear, in similar modes and for similar purposes. Besides these points, indicating a similarity in character, there are some in which there is an evident similarity of meaning, which seems to indicate still more strongly than the instances last mentioned the absolute affinity of these languages.

Having endeavoured to show that the Malay language is a kindred tongue to the Chinese, he points out that the language spoken by the Malays properly so called, has received, at two different periods, important additions from distinct languages, in a manner somewhat similar to that in which the Anglo-Saxon, the original of our own tongue, became blended with Norman-French. These admixtures, or infusions as Dr. Lang calls them, consisted, in the case of the Malay language,

1st, Of the introduction of a considerable number of Sanscrit words. This modification of the Malay language appears to have been accompanied by a corresponding change in the religion of the Malays, who are supposed to have adopted that of their Sanscrit teachers. 2nd, The next infusion which the Malay language received was from some of the enterprising followers of Mahomet, who introduced both the language and the religion of the Koran. This introduction of Sanscrit and Arabic words into the Malay language appears to explain in a satisfactory manner some of the differences between the Malay language as it exists at the present day and the dialects which are found in those widely scattered islands, from Madagascar to Easter Island, the inhabitants of which are generally admitted to speak a language related to the Malay. The Polynesian language, consisting of several closely allied dialects, appears to have been derived from the Malay before it had received the Arabic or even the Sanscrit infusion, and consequently points to a very remote period, at which the occupation of those islands commenced.

Dr. Lang endeavours to show that this connexion, as indicated by the state of the language, is confirmed by many features of resemblance between the present or past habits of the Oceanic islanders and the Asiatic race from whence they are supposed to have sprung. Some of the most striking instances of similarity consist in the separation of the inhabitants into castes, keeping themselves punctiliously from each other; in the adoption of a different language according as the person speaking is of one class and the individual addressed is of an-



other; in their treatment of females; in the superstitious observance of Taboos; in the possession of the rite of circumcision; in some of their games; and in the chewing of the Betel-nut.

The Doctor devotes some pages to account for the origin of a revolting peculiarity which has characterized nearly, if not all, the widely extended ramifications of the Polynesian race, namely, their propensity to eat human flesh. The Doctor accounts for it by supposing that it originated in the urgent calls of extreme hunger experienced by those who made the long and disastrous voyages which have given a kindred population to widely remote islands. In these voyages, often performed without design, under the irresistible influence of wind or current, the stock of provisions must often have been extremely inadequate, and the starving islanders in their canoes may thus have been impelled to partake of the flesh of such of their companions as may have first perished from want, or they may have sacrificed one or more of their number to sustain the rest. The recurrence of such causes, in conjunction with the warlike habits of the people and their human sacrifices, would tend to encourage a practice which the almost total absence of animal food, excepting fish, would be likely still further to promote.

I need not, at present, further pursue the analysis of Dr. Lang's work as respects the Polynesian nations' dialects and manners; but before I notice that part of his work in which he endeavours to connect the Polynesian with the American nations, I must mention, from the before-mentioned tabular view given by Dr. Prichard, what appears to be the state of America with respect to its nations and languages. The former appear considerably to exceed 300, and the latter seem to be proportionably numerous, but of these many are unknown. Notwithstanding that a vast number of these languages are stated to be totally distinct, we have the authority of some excellent philologists, and more particularly that of Baron Alexander de Humboldt, that there is a sort of common genius or constitution pervading all these languages as far as they have been examined, and which unites them into one group, whilst it distinguishes them from nearly or quite all others. A more recent traveller, Dr. Von Martius, of whose interesting memoir on the state of the civil and natural rights of the aborigines of the Brazils a translation is given in the Journal of the Geographical Society, confirms the fact of the very great number of the American languages, and mentions that in Brazil alone more than 150 languages and dialects are spoken, by more than 250 nations completely broken up and mostly incapable of communicating with each other. The Doctor



adduces this statement in conjunction with the present state of the American Indian tribes in support of his hypothesis that the American race is altogether distinct from the rest of mankind, and that the uncivilized tribes with which we are at present acquainted are the debris of one or more nations who, having attained civilization, subsequently relapsed into a state of barbarism, which allowed of their being broken up into distinct nations and tribes, whose migrations during countless ages has brought them into the deplorable state in which they now exist, and which he thus describes :

“ In fact, the present and future condition of this red race of men, who wander about in their native land, without house or covering, whom the most benevolent and brotherly love despairs of ever providing with a home, is a monstrous and tragical drama, such as no fiction of the poet ever yet presented to our contemplation. A whole race of men is wasting away before the eyes of its commiserating contemporaries ; no power of princes, philosophy, or Christianity can arrest its proudly gloomy progress towards a certain and utter destruction.” (Journal of the Royal Geographical Society, vol. ii.)

Though I shall not stop to combat this opinion, I cannot refrain from expressing my confident hope that a better fate awaits that interesting portion of the human family, and that Europeans and their descendants, in laying aside the atrocious and exterminating policy which they have too long adopted towards those who have preceded them in the occupation of America, will yet be able to redeem their character by successfully pursuing a more liberal and humane system, which it is truly gratifying to observe they are at length, at least in some instances, disposed to substitute for it.

If the views of Dr. Von Martius are gloomy and calculated to throw discouragement in the way of philological and other researches into the origin and history of the American nations, those of Dr. Lang, which are diametrically opposed to them, may be thought to err on the other side.

Dr. Lang has been induced to believe that America derived its inhabitants from Asia through the Polynesian Islands. He appears successfully to get over the difficulty which would probably be the first to suggest itself in the way of this opinion, namely, that the course which he contends for would be opposed to the direction of wind and current. He brings forward the evidence of several distinguished navigators to prove that westerly winds and currents are of sufficient frequency and duration to allow of canoes and other vessels being carried by them from the Polynesian Islands to the



western coast of America. This difficulty being set aside, the Doctor supports the probability of his hypothesis by setting forth various points on which the American nations exhibit a resemblance or affinity to the Polynesian Islanders. Even the languages of America, which are so numerous and so peculiar, instead of presenting an insuperable difficulty, have furnished Dr. Lang with a few arguments in his favour. Many of the names of rivers, creeks, districts, towns, persons, and natural objects bear a decidedly Polynesian character; and some words bear this resemblance in signification also. He refers to the idea maintained by De Zuniga that the Philippine Islands were peopled from America, since the features of resemblance pointed out by him tend to strengthen the supposition of a remote connexion between the Americans and these islanders, whatever may have been the direction in which the communication took place. De Zuniga, in comparing the language of the Philippine Islands to some of those which are spoken by American Indians, says that they are strikingly conformable in their character and structure. Dr. Lang maintains the correctness of this assertion, notwithstanding its contradiction by Marsden. He notices Capt. Basil Hall's observation that the Indians of Acapulco bear a resemblance to the Malays. The advances towards civilization which had been made by the natives of America before the arrival of the Spaniards appear to have been of Polynesian character, as exhibited in their workmanship, their fortifications, temples, and images. Dr. Lang particularly compares the Mexican pyramids with one of a similar construction, 270 feet long, in Atehu, which has unfortunately been destroyed. He notices also a similarity in their mode of worship and holding councils, in their superstitions with respect to the Taboo, and in the wide diffusion of cannibalism, which he conceives to have been maintained as an occasional rite, derived by the Americans from their Polynesian forefathers when the accidental plea of necessity no longer existed. I shall conclude this brief sketch of Dr. Lang's views with the following quotations from his work:

“It is doubtless impossible to fix the date of the original discovery of America with any degree of precision. Still, however, we may come within a moderate distance of the truth even on this dark subject. There is evidence to guide the judicious inquirer, scanty in its amount, doubtless, but definite in its announcements, and just as little likely to mislead as the records of ancient eclipses.

“1. The sources of this evidence to which we are naturally directed is the Polynesian language. In tracing the affinities



of the Malayan and Polynesian tongues, I have already remarked that there are two epochs in the history of the former to which our attention ought to be especially turned. The first of these is the epoch of the Sanscrit, the second the epoch of the Arabic, infusion.

“Of the Arabic, or more recent infusion, the Polynesian language exhibits no trace whatever. We are therefore warranted to conclude that the stream of emigration had ceased to flow from the Indian Archipelago towards the continent of America long before the æra of Mahomet, or the rise and prevalence of the Saracen power.

“Of the Sanscrit, or more ancient infusion, which has even changed the aspect and character of the ancient Malayan language, its Polynesian sister, or rather daughter, exhibits no tincture whatever. It follows, therefore, that the stream of emigration, which was destined to people the South Sea Islands and the continent of America, must have been flowing from the Indian Archipelago towards that distant continent long before the ancient Sanscrit language was spoken in the Indian isles. But that venerable language, like the Latin and Greek tongues in Europe, has been a dead language in India for many centuries. It must have been a living language at a period when a portion of its substance was imbedded into the Malayan tongue; a period, we have reason to believe, long anterior to the Christian æra. But before that period had arrived, the forefathers of the present Polynesians must have quitted the Indian Archipelago, and individuals of their number may perhaps have reached the far-distant American land.

“2. The religion of the Polynesians and the Indo-Americans indicates, in like manner, a remote antiquity. The idea that God is a spirit invisible to man, is still common to both of these numerous divisions of the human family.

“3. These indications of remote antiquity are borne out and corroborated in a remarkable manner by the style and character of those remains of ancient Polynesian, as well as of ancient Indo-American architecture, which have hitherto excited the wonder and mocked the ingenuity of the ablest speculators. These remains consist chiefly of the ruins of ancient temples, pyramids, and tumuli; the chief and the most remarkable characteristics of which are, the magnitude of their dimensions and the massiveness of their architecture compared with those of the ephemeral erections of modern times, and especially with those of the erections of the more recent aboriginal inhabitants of America and of the South Sea Islands. Now, it appears to me, that just as an architect



who surveys the ruin of some ancient building for the first time, can at once tell the age or period to which its erection is to be assigned merely from the style of its architecture, and can pronounce it unhesitatingly either a Celtic, or a Saxon, or a Norman erection, there is a sort of internal evidence afforded by these most interesting remains of Polynesian and Indo-American civilization, which can enable an attentive observer to ascertain, with a tolerable degree of precision, the age or period in the past history of man, to which their erection may be referred. In short, I conceive that the ruins in question afford us a means of ascertaining the period at which the forefathers of the modern Polynesian and Indo-American races originally took their departure from the Indian Archipelago." (Dr. Lang's *Origin and Migration of the Polynesian Nation*, p. 203-4.)

The views of Dr. Lang, although founded on observation and supported by several independent facts, and also possessing in my opinion a great degree of probability, can only be regarded as an hypothetical solution of the mystery which involves the history and languages of the races to which it refers. It must be remembered that it is opposed to the views of that great Polynesian scholar W. Marsden, and is yet more decidedly at variance with the opinion of a learned author of an article on the Oceanic languages in the *Foreign Quarterly Review*. It is the opinion of that author that the various insular languages, as well as the continental, are in most cases distinct and indigenous, and that the numerous coincidences which are met with, and which he is compelled to admit as evidence of a common connecting cause, are the result of infusions from one common source into preexisting languages. To support this view the reviewer has recourse to the hypothesis that there had, at some former period, existed somewhere in the Indian Archipelago one of those independent foci of civilization which he calls in to his aid for the solution of several of the difficulties with which the subject abounds. I must confess that it seems to me much more probable that the languages spoken in the Oceanic Islands, whatever may have been their origin, have been introduced into the different islands very much in the same state in which we find them: this idea seems not only more consistent with the general similarity which prevails amongst the inhabitants of those islands with respect to peculiarities of race, manners, and religion, but also with the prevailing character of the languages themselves. Moreover, there is a want of simplicity in the conjecture that these islands have each received for themselves, by infusion from a common source, those words on which the most striking similarity de-



pend; it seems to involve the necessity of numerous accidents, precisely similar to each other, having happened to each of these inhabited islands. Difficulties of this kind are sufficient to show that we are still greatly in want of the data from which a solution can be drawn.

It is of the utmost importance that those who observe, describe, and collect these data should give the naked but complete truth, unbiassed by the opinion to which they may incline, although it may be perfectly allowable to them to contemplate, from time to time, the fragments which they may have brought together, since such surveys are not only pleasing in themselves but may be the means of pointing the way to new researches. Thus, I had no sooner read the view exhibited by Dr. Lang than my attention was awakened to what may be merely an accidental coincidence, but which nevertheless suggests an inquiry which may bring to light some curious facts. In the last number of the Asiatic Society's Journal there is an interesting abstract of a work by a Chinese antiquary on the ancient vases of his country. These vases, which appear to be as highly prized by the virtuosi of China, as the Grecian, Sicilian, and Etruscan vases are by the collectors of Europe, are calculated, like them, to afford a few important rays of historical light; in fact it appears that they afford data which are even more valuable, since they preserve inscriptions which are still legible, and may themselves be referred with greater certainty to particular ages. In looking at the sketches of some of these vases to which the greatest antiquity is ascribed, I was forcibly struck with a similarity between the designs with which they are ornamented and the carvings upon some implements brought from the South Sea Islands. One of the points of resemblance consisted in the mode in which uncouth representations of the human countenance are repeated upon the same article. I am well aware that there is no necessity to call in the assistance of remote connexion between the artists producing these works, in the fact of their both rudely attempting to imitate the same forms when the originals were equally present to both. It is the similarity in the mode in which they each deviate from nature which is, at least, remarkable. The attention which this casual observation excited, has induced me to look with greater interest at the variously carved and ornamented implements brought from the South Seas and preserved in cabinets, and I have observed that besides the characteristic and often beautiful patterns which these carvings exhibit, we may occasionally find the representations of human and other figures which, notwithstanding the rudeness of the outline, appear to have



been destined to tell some story,—that in fact they are a kind of hieroglyphic.

Although the circumstances which these symbols are meant to record must now be lost in oblivion, it is by no means impossible that they may lead to the detection of a system for the expression of ideas, the investigation of which may be a useful adjunct to our inquiries respecting the oral languages of these islands; at least in the total absence of alphabetic writing these imperfect attempts must not be wholly lost sight of.

With respect to the second part of Dr. Lang's views, namely, that America was peopled by the Polynesian race, it must I conceive be admitted, that although the Doctor has found more plausible reasons in its favour than might have been anticipated, and also more successfully met objections which at first might be regarded as insuperable, there is, nevertheless, too great a chasm in the proof, both as respects the transport of individuals to the continent of America from the distant islands, and still more with respect to the connexion to be found between the very numerous American languages, and the very few or perhaps even the single one belonging to the Polynesian Islands, for us to receive his views in this respect as anything more than a conjecture which he has ingeniously rendered in a good degree probable. There is unquestionably a similarity between the form of the head which prevails amongst the inhabitants of the Pacific Islands and that exhibited by the skulls of Peruvians and other South Americans. This interesting fact had often forcibly attracted my attention long before I had any idea of Dr. Lang's views. Heads, of the form here alluded to, do not however exhibit the universal character of the American heads. Skulls have been found in ancient places of sepulture presenting so very remarkable a form that one or more distinguished naturalists have regarded it as an irrefragable proof that the skulls in question belonged to a totally distinct branch of the human race. I must confess that my views are decidedly at variance with the views of those naturalists, and avow my conviction that there is very adequate internal evidence that this peculiarity of form is the result of artificial causes applied to modify the shape. The position of the foramen magnum as compared with the facial angle, the lateral distortion of the head, and the situation of the greater part of the cerebral mass, go far to support my assertion. It is further to be observed that heads having somewhat of this remarkable form are found in company with other heads in which no distortion has taken place, but which, on the contrary, exhibit the character before alluded to as resembling that of the South Sea Islanders, whilst at the same time there are other reasons for inferring that the dis-



torted and undistorted heads belong to the same race. Recent skulls exhibiting precisely the same character as to form, but with respect to which there is not only stronger internal evidence of distortion, but also the well-ascertained particulars as to the mode in which this distortion is produced, are met with over a wide extent of country quite in the north of North America. That the Caribs, living at a great distance in another direction, procured a somewhat similar distortion by analogous means, is a well-known fact. We have therefore evidence of the wide extension of a similar custom whether a similarity of race be admitted or not.

If, however, we can find reasons in favour of the probability of America having in part at least received its population from the islands of the Pacific, we must not lose sight of those reasons which with at least equal probability give support to the idea that America was peopled from Asia from the north-west: the near approach of these continents in that direction, the traditions which still existed amongst the Mexicans when Europeans first became acquainted with them, and which Clavigero and Humboldt have so successfully rescued from oblivion, the very striking similarities between the calendar of the Mexicans and that of some Asiatic nations which Humboldt has pointed out, afford arguments in favour of this side of the question which are generally known and admitted. My friend Joseph Hawse, who has paid great attention to the languages spoken by the North American Indians, informs me that he has observed points of resemblance between these languages and those which are spoken by the Tartar tribes. This, however, is a subject on which much further philological research is required before we can rest satisfied with any conclusions which may be drawn. I must further remark, that if in the observation which I have made respecting a resemblance between the form of the head in some of the South Sea Islands and that of some which either exist at present or have existed in America, more especially towards the western coast of South America, we find an argument in favour of the Polynesian descent of Americans, there is also evidence of a similar character in favour of an Asiatic origin by a north-western route. Through the kindness of my friend Captain Chapman, the museum of Guy's Hospital is possessed of casts of skulls which were taken from very ancient tumuli which existed not far from the Falls of Niagara, which tumuli are considered to have been the work of a race which inhabited that district prior to the Indian race with which we are at present acquainted. These skulls bear a most striking resemblance to those of the Esquimaux, which are known to exhibit the character of the Mongolian rather than of the Malay race. In the same tumulus



with these skulls there were found various implements, such as bracelets of copper, breastplates of shell, and pieces of wampum, and, what is most remarkable, a large shell truncated so as to serve as a trumpet, which has been asserted to be an Asiatic and not an American production. It would appear from these facts, that though we are only acquainted with the mere existence of this race by its very scanty relics, it has nevertheless transmitted to us historic evidence of a very strong and interesting character. Whilst their wampum is altogether American, and connects them with the present races, who only know them by obscure tradition, the form of their heads and their Asiatic shell no less strongly connect them with Asia.

If many of the languages which we have been considering are threatened with absolute extinction, together with the feeble families of the human race by whom they are spoken, in a way which has probably never been the case at any former period of the world, there likewise exists at the present time a greater amount of means which might be rendered availing for the preservation and investigation of these languages, together with the traditions, manners, and superstitions which it is essential to know, if successful and satisfactory attempts are to be made to elucidate those obscure portions of the history of mankind; a portion of history, be it remembered, which is intimately connected with the interests of religion, notwithstanding the barren aspect which it at first seems to present.

At no former period were there so many and so great facilities for sending to almost every part of the globe. The way seems opening even across the arid deserts and pestilential swamps of Africa, and the hitherto inaccessible regions of that continent are traversed by our enterprising countrymen, whom, on the other hand,

“ Non Boreæ finitimum latus  
Duratæque solo nives abigunt.”

At the same time the cultivators of every branch of science are united into societies to extend an interest and to spread information on subjects connected with their respective researches. The progress which has been made in the physical geography of the globe attests how much geologists and mineralogists, botanists and zoologists, have done for their respective sciences. The geography of plants may now be taught to every child. The same means and facilities which have produced so many valuable results might be turned with equal success to the advancement of our knowledge of the geography of man; and I cannot help flattering myself that our Association, small as it is, may most essentially contribute to the attainment of this most important object: in the first place, by formally addressing those bodies and associations which are already in the pos-



session of what may be regarded as the machinery essential to the prompt diffusion of information and inquiry. A formal appeal coming from a society would have much more weight than the influence which any single individual could possess. With this view I conceive it might be well for us to draw up a collection of queries to be forwarded to the societies in question, accompanied with a short memorial urging the importance of the subject and soliciting cooperation. The Royal Society, the Geographical, the Zoological, the Linnæan, and perhaps the Society of Antiquaries, might be memorialized for this purpose, and I am inclined to believe that the officers of the Admiralty would be far from unwilling, if properly appealed to, to give most important aid in such an investigation. There are other bodies which I have not yet mentioned, but which in the assistance they may afford us are inferior to none; I allude to the different Missionary Societies. Some of these have far more extensive relations with some parts of the globe, and the feeble races inhabiting them, than any other bodies or associations. The zeal and devotion of their missionaries, which prompt them not merely to visit but to reside amongst the uncivilized or half-civilized families of the human species, would enable them to collect more extensive and more accurate information than can be collected by the traveller transiently passing through the district, whatever may be the superiority of his talents and acquirements. We are already indebted to some of those missionaries for most important and valuable information of the very kind which it is so desirable to collect. The name of Ellis, which must be familiar to every one, will sufficiently illustrate this remark. But what missionaries have done in this respect has been rather the fruit of their own good sense and individual interest than the result of a general purpose, or of instructions furnished to them by the Boards which have sent them forth.

The character of some of their exertions is thus described in an article on Kay's Caffraria, in the North American Quarterly Review.

“The attempt which the missionaries had made to translate special parts of the sacred volume into the Caffer language, manifests, in our judgement, more zeal than discretion. According to our author, their plan has been to translate a passage from the English version into ‘barbarous Dutch,’ and then to express it in the Caffer language as dictated by an ignorant interpreter. Till some better method than this is adopted many persons will distrust the benefit of the translation, since it is probable that error or nonsense will take the place of truth. However this may be, many converts having been made amongst the Caffers, and considerable inquiry excited



amongst the people generally, the period is probably not far distant when Christianity, in some shape or other, will be openly professed by the whole nation. A translation of the Bible may then be undertaken with a better prospect of fidelity, as the children of the missionaries, who will have learned the native language, or the Caffèr children who have been instructed in the English, will be exempt from the inconvenience now experienced by the missionaries."

We cannot hope to draw sound and correct philological inductions from data thus obtained.

Many instances might be adduced to show that the zeal of the missionaries is often greater than their knowledge and wisdom, and has led them to destroy the existence and recollection of those relics and traditions which, in conjunction with the affinities of language, afford the best, it may almost be said the only, materials amongst which we can hope to find any satisfactory solution of the obscure question of the origin and history of the nations alluded to. They seem to flatter themselves that they are doing God service when they destroy anything which has been connected with the idolatrous worship and superstitions of the uncivilized nations, and they prompt their half-instructed converts to continue the work. They seem to forget that the worship of images is not the besetting sin of the present day as it was when the children of Israel were continually giving way to it. On the contrary, it is out of fashion, and must inevitably yield to the rapid and general diffusion of knowledge. The enemies and rivals which obstruct the progress of true religion in the present day, are to be found in the idols of our own imaginations, and in our own hearts' lusts; but some are also to be found in the skilfully directed attacks of sceptics whose fine talents and cultivated abilities are prostituted to the evil work of undermining the sacred authority of religion. The most powerful of such attacks are those which are set forth in the guise of appeals to matters of fact. The enlightened advocate of the cause of Christianity must therefore look with jealousy at the destruction of whatever may tend to throw light on those points on which he is at issue with the sceptic. Amongst these he must regard everything which tends to elucidate those parts of the history of the human race which are most obscure. He must therefore value and desire to preserve rather than seek to destroy the works of art, traditions, and mythology of uncivilized nations. He will rejoice in the industrious collection and preservation of them, and be more zealous in accumulating facts of this description than in employing his imagination in devising explanations from imperfect data, the fallacy of which time will reveal, to the injury of the cause which he had inexpertly espoused. If we can succeed in placing this subject in its



proper light before the Missionary Societies, we shall have rendered them an important service, and receive in return the most valuable cooperation which we can at present seek.

If missionaries have the means of obtaining the most minute and accurate information in consequence of their longer residence amongst the natives of uncivilized countries, the captains and medical men serving on board our merchant vessels have the advantage of affording more frequent opportunities of communication ; and from the circumstance of their visiting several tribes in succession, they have facilities for instituting comparisons and discovering resemblances, provided their attention were turned to the subject, which the missionary confined to a particular spot does not possess. We should therefore do well to seek the assistance of merchants, both individually and in their associations ; and from their well-known liberality and benevolence we may reasonably hope that the appeal will not be made in vain. Several mercantile expeditions have already made important contributions to our stock of knowledge of the description to which I am alluding ; and were the appeal which I have just proposed at all generally attended to, materials would be more rapidly collected than by any other process which could be suggested, and at the same time a great collateral advantage would be gained in the improvement which it would be likely to produce in the treatment which the uncivilized nations too often receive from the crews of our merchant vessels, whose abuses in this respect appear to be most supinely and culpably neglected.

Another method of promoting the object which I have had in view would be to bring home to this country the living languages themselves, which would give to the masters of philological research a better opportunity of pursuing their investigations than they could find in vocabularies collected by travellers, even though more care were to be taken in obtaining them than perhaps has hitherto been generally the case. The advantages of the plan proposed, namely, that of bringing home living languages themselves in the mouths of the natives, would very much depend on the care which should be exercised in the selection of individuals : the object should be to choose the most intelligent. Where missionaries and others have succeeded in introducing schools, the best mode of selection would probably be to take two or three of the most intelligent and best informed, who might be brought forward by a regular competition or *concours*. The voyage to Europe, being thus contended for like an open fellowship at an university, would afford a great stimulus to the scholars in these schools, and would therefore benefit the people from whom the lads were selected, whilst it would serve the cause of Philology. In the execution of this



plan, it is very probable that the liberality of the Admiralty and of merchants owning vessels might most materially assist. A combination of efforts for this purpose might form the basis of an institution something like the Propaganda at Rome, where young men from various countries are educated and trained to become influential missionaries amongst their countrymen. The great importance which the most politic leaders in the See of Rome attach to this institution is a strong proof of the influence which it is capable of exerting, and it is somewhat surprising that this example has remained so long without imitation amongst Protestant nations. It would not, however, be necessary to wait for the formation of a magnificent establishment like the Propaganda in order to act on the suggestions which I have offered. The Managers of the London University, whose liberality supplies us with the means of meeting as we do this evening, might possibly be induced to give to foreign youths, properly selected, free admission to the classes; and the missionary societies and other associations under whose auspices such youths were brought to this country, might easily provide for their suitable accommodation in the vicinity of the University.

If I am not greatly mistaken, the united operation of the different plans which I have proposed would speedily rescue much valuable matter from the irretrievable destruction to which it is now hastening; a stimulus would be given to a most important branch of Philology, which would give it a new position amongst the sciences, and it would acquire a popularity which it had never before possessed. It is not every one who is formed by nature to become a great Philologist: for the formation of such a character, it is essential that the individual should possess an incommunicable talent for the acquisition of languages, which seems analogous to that possessed by other individuals, who almost intuitively perform the most abstruse and laborious arithmetical calculations. Examples of such linguists have been seen in Sir William Jones, the celebrated Messofanti of Bologna, William and Alexander Humboldt, Dr. Morrison, whose recent death has cast a gloom over the friends to the religious improvements of Asia, and many others; but, I cannot close the list without mentioning the name of my late friend John Fowler Hull, who when he was scarcely twenty-five years of age had made himself familiarly acquainted with nearly thirty languages, when he fell a victim to the zeal with which he pursued in India his philological researches into the ancient and modern languages of that country. The talent for the acquisition and investigation of languages differs in one important particular at least from that which is exhibited in the performance of mathematical calculation to which I have compared it. Number in the abstract is present to



every one as a material with which he may work; it is not so with language. The extraordinary genius whose talent lies in the direction of language is at the mercy of accidental circumstances for the development of his powers. Yet we may judge how strong is the passion which actuates such an individual when we see how much has been done with a stray leaf which has been torn off from some foreign work. Even those who are placed under ordinarily favourable circumstances have their attention limited to a comparatively few languages, and those with which they commence, being generally dead languages, are perhaps in the first instance more calculated to damp than to encourage their zeal. When this difficulty is surmounted, they find so vast an amount of intellectual treasure, to which the acquisition of those languages has opened the way, that they may feel little inducement to desist from their attention to these languages in favour of others of less promising appearance. Nevertheless, the greatly increased extent which has been given to the study of the Oriental languages, the renewed attention which is paid to Anglo-Saxon, and the occasional appearance of works connected even with the languages of uncivilized nations, are amply sufficient to prove the possibility of increasing the extent of philological inquiry, and of procuring a host of zealous students, who, if they should not find their labours rewarded with classical treasures to be compared with those of Greece which tell

“...of Thebes or Pelops’ line,  
Or the tale of Troy divine,”

may yet enjoy the consciousness that they open the way to a clearer and more comprehensive view of our species as a whole; that they are substituting fact for visionary speculation on a most important subject; and that in calling increased attention to the feeble, the abused, and perishing branches of the human family, they may be the means of arousing a powerful influence in their behalf, whereby they may be rescued from annihilation, and given to participate in the highest attributes and choicest privileges of our nature. Such, Gentlemen, is the prospect which, with perhaps too sanguine eyes, I have imagined that I see before us in the quarter to which I have ventured to direct your attention this evening; I have only to add, that if you think with me that there is anything feasible in the suggestions which I have offered, I would earnestly solicit your cooperation in endeavouring to carry them into execution\*.

\* The Philological Society has appointed a committee to draw up a set of queries in conformity with the suggestion contained in the preceding paper. When completed, they will be published in a future number of this journal.

THE END.